



spill the beans

worship and learning resources for all ages

issue 21

advent, christmas, epiphany

27 november 2016 to 26 february 2017

sampler

A resource with a Scottish flavour for
Worship Leaders, Sunday Schools,
Junior Churches and Youth Leaders,
based on the Narrative Lectionary.

spillbeans.org.uk
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introduction

AT THE BEGINNING OF 2009 a conversation began amongst a couple, then a few, then a group about collaboratively creating resources that enabled us to tell the story of faith in a worship context and within age groups for younger people and teens. Spill the Beans was born as the result of that conversation and has grown and developed over the intervening years.

The ethos has remained the same, however. It's all about story. For we believe story is the lifeblood of faith. In story we can tell the truth and speak with honesty about things for which there are not yet words. Story contains mystery and is the poetry that forms faith. Stories grow as we grow and can reveal new truths at different times in our lives.

So we believe giving stories to people is one of the most important things we can do in sharing our faith. Children and adults hold stories in their being and keep coming back to them throughout life. Our culture is stored in story. The same is true for our faith.

Narrative Lectionary

Over the course of 2011-2014 the Spill the Beans Resource Team completed a full cycle through the Revised Common Lectionary. As we neared the end of that cycle we began discussion about what to do once we had completed that cycle. We considered the pros and cons of remaining with the RCL for another cycle or trying a different tack. We have decided, in a spirit of continual experimentation, to journey with the Narrative

Lectionary which began a new four year cycle in September 2014. In this issue we start the third year of the Narrative Lectionary cycle.

Note that a set of previous issues (1-12) which covered a cycle of the Revised Common Lectionary is available to purchase.

The Narrative Lectionary is a relatively new four year lectionary that focuses on story and retelling the broad sweep of the biblical narrative in each year. We felt that this focus has a natural resonance with the ethos of Spill the Beans. It is a little experimental and has the feel of a new adventure.

Why have we decided to do this? To fully understand this you need to know that Spill the Beans is a work of love. None of the contributors are paid for their contributions, these contributions are written and prepared with our own congregations in mind. Instead of working in isolation, we bring this work together, give it some spit and polish, and share it with others. This is how we can keep the cost so low.

Many of the team were attracted to the freshness of the different approach taken by the NL and see it as a means of sparking new ideas and experiences for our congregations.

We pray you will also be enthused and enlivened by a new approach within worship and in your age groups, engaging with the great biblical narrative so that all people will let these stories shape their own story of faith.

spilling the beans

IN THIS 21ST ISSUE of Spill the Beans you will find an extensive collection of things to use each week. Each piece is written with specific congregations in mind rather than some average congregation. Thus there may be the need to be a little creative yourselves in adapting and evolving some of the ideas to suit your own place and culture and congregation. That is a good thing.

Of course, if you are creative and you'd like to share what you have done, then we have a place for that on our blog (<http://spillbeans.org.uk>) and Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/spillbeansresources>. There you will find PowerPoint backgrounds for most weeks, a live discussion of the passages for that week and how we might be able to adapt and recreate what has been suggested.

These are a few ideas that possibly expand upon the story offering words, phrases, poetry and ideas that could be used in some way in worship. We encourage you not to use these exactly as they are but rather edit, expand and enmesh these ideas within the culture of your own faith community.

Each week we provide a selection of words, ideas and creative moments to take the theme and the passage a little further. We do not provide a ready made service or perfect prayers but ideas and pointers that hopefully scratch at your own creativity and provoke heaven's imagination within you.

Here are some helpful tips to guide you in your use of the material in age groups:

1. It presumes some introduction to the story will have taken place in worship together or will play a part in the service when children join it later.

2. Depending on the make-up of your own groups of children you will need to remain flexible in how you use the material.
3. Each idea has been given a guide age range to help your planning, but this is only a guide so use your own judgement about what will work with your group.
4. Before the sit-down activities if you have a group of young children or lots of boys, you may want to add a run-around type game to expend some energy.
5. Use the gathering time exercise with the whole group to get into the story together across the ages.
6. We encourage you to retell the story together.
7. Follow that by choosing as many or as few activities your space and time allow. You could offer a number of activities each at different stations all at the same time for all ages to self-select with a teacher staffing each one, or have traditional classes.
8. During activities, ask children to retell the story to you and ask about their week, what was happy and what was sad and if this week's story reminds them of other biblical and personal stories.
9. The intention is not to complete "the tasks" brilliantly, but rather to provide opportunities to begin conversations, build relationships, retell the story of the day, and talk about what it means for us today.
10. There are many websites that provide handout-type sheets that will have images, crosswords and wordsearches for the story of that week. They can be helpful in an emergency, but try to be more creative as leaders, the rewards are worth it.



LATEST NEWS contents

ALTERNativity

We are great supporters of the work that ALTERNativity does to encourage people to think during the Advent and Christmas season more deeply and engage spiritually in this great festive season.

Please do check their website for resources and ideas. These include new Festive Family Boxes which have been produced with help from the Spill the Beans Team. Knowing that

Christmas is both busy and costly we've kept the activities simple and encourage children to use things which can be found around the home, rather than going out and buying yet one more thing. Each day has something to do for children

and a reflection for adults. We want to encourage all the family to get involved and just take five minutes out from the nativity plays, Christmas parties and shopping mayhem to spend a little time together.



Please visit <https://www.alternativity.org.uk/>.

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spill the beans resource team

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND EXTRA MATERIALS, join us on the Spill the Beans blog: <http://spillbeans.org.uk> or join the community at <http://www.facebook.com/spillbeansresources>.

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Key to Abbreviations

In the worship ideas section the following abbreviations may be used to indicate different sources of worship music:

ATAS	All the Assembly Songs You'll Ever Need
CG	Common Ground
CH4	Church Hymnary, 4th Edition
CH3	Church Hymnary, 3rd Edition
JP	Junior Praise
MP	Complete Mission Praise
SGP	Songs of God's People
WGRG	Wild Goose Resource Group



through the season

Introduction

In this section you will find some ideas for scene-setting activities and a weekly focus as you move through the season.

These ideas are provided for you to use and adapt depending on your own setting.

These ideas provide possible ways of linking all the weeks together which can be a helpful reminder to people of the thread of the story and the key aspects being focused on during worship.

This season takes us through Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, a time filled with hopes, dreams and visions.

To bring the different themes into focus in worship, a giant dream catcher might be constructed that captures many different elements and symbols of the season.

Dream catchers are used by Native Americans, traditionally hung in windows to capture good dreams and prevent bad dreams from entering a room.

It seems appropriate to use the symbols of an unbroken circle, a spider like web, and elements of the hopes and dreams of the season to help us visualise the mystery of the Incarnation and to pray for the opening of our eyes as we move through Advent, Christmas and Epiphany.



Using a large hula hoop, craft a web from twine or linked elastic bands or colourful loom bands.

Into this web we will insert a symbol each week that resonates with the story.

If the dream catcher can be propped or hung up somewhere, everyone will be able to see the gathered symbols.

Once the feathers are inserted (Advent 1-3) it may be possible to craft some of the other symbols from paper. It may be a good idea to involve the young people in this preparation ahead of time or you might involve the whole congregation.

The symbols can be threaded through the web or suspended from the hoop as appropriate.

Week By Week

27 Nov Advent 1

Story: Daniel 6:6-27
 Title: A Sleepless Night
 Action: This week, the King might well have suffered nightmares about Daniel's fate in the Lion's den, if he had been able to sleep at all.
 Feathers often feature in dream catchers. Thread some black and red feathers into the web as a symbol of those dreams we do not want to have or for the things that keep us awake at nights.

4 Dec Advent 2

Story: Joel 2:12-13, 28-29
 Title: God's Hopeful Vision
 Action: Add some white feathers to symbolise the possibility of catching God's vision.

11 Dec Advent 3

Story: Isaiah 61:1-11
 Title: Living the Dream
 Action: Add some brightly coloured feathers to symbolise all the good things that God promises.

18 Dec Advent 4

Story: Luke 1:26-56
 Title: The Magnificat
 Action: Add a star, symbolising the prophecy of light coming into the world.

24 Dec Christmas Eve

Story: Luke 2:1-14(15-20)
 Title: Delivery Day
 Action: Add a quill pen, a recognition of the census underway at the time when Jesus was born.

25 Dec Christmas Day

Story: Luke 2:8-20
 Title: Shepherds Visit
 Action: Add an angel (or choir of angels) and some sheep.

1 Jan Christmas 1

Story: Luke 2:21-38
 Title: Dedicated to God
 Action: Add a crown and the name "Jesus".

8 Jan Baptism of our Lord

Story: Luke 3:1-22
 Title: Affirmation
 Action: Add a dove.



your notes

15 Jan Epiphany 2

Story: Luke 4:14-30

Title: The Manifesto

Action: Add a scroll or little rolls of paper, each with a line of the prophecy written or printed on it.

22 Jan Epiphany 3

Story: Luke 5:1-11

Title: A Fisherman's Tale

Action: Add a picture of a boat and some fish, symbolising the call to be fishers of people.

29 Jan Epiphany 4

Story: Luke 6:1-16

Title: Sabbath Choices

Action: Add some wheat stalks (or image of them).

5 Feb Epiphany 5

Story: Luke 7:1-17

Title: Reconciling Authority

Action: Add some paper people chains, symbolising the interconnections and networks of relationships that Jesus reconciles.

12 Feb Epiphany 6

Story: Luke 7:18-35

Title: Are You the One?

Action: Add a pair of spectacles with the question "What do you see?"

19 Feb Epiphany 7

Story: Luke 7:36-50

Title: Love's Motivation

Action: Add a tiny bottle of perfume/oil, symbolising the expensive ointment used.

26 Feb Transfiguration

Story: Luke 9:28-45

Title: A Second Affirmation

Action: Add a picture of a hill/mountain or a piece of white cloth.

sampler



blue christmas

a liturgy for a reflective service recognising loss

Introduction

While Advent and Christmas is a time of great festivity and joy for the majority of people within the Christian Community, it must be recognised that Christmas can be a particularly difficult time for people who may be grieving a loss, for those who are living alone, or those who have painful associations with this time of year.

As we have done in previous years, we provide this liturgy as a basis for a service that could be offered to your congregation at some point during this season. Our experiences have shown that this can be a very well received and helpful service. At a number of points during the liturgy you will find two alternative ideas included.

Liturgy

Gathering

As people gather, they are given an order of service and a Christmas gift tag on which names can be written to hang on the tree. The tree is hung with blue baubles.

Welcome

Come away in.
Rest awhile in the quiet,
out of the crowds,
out of the buzz.

Come as you are.
Bring your sorrow
and your grief
and know yourself
loved, accepted, welcomed
by the God who is love.

Carol

Prayer 1

God, in all the busyness of the season,
we give you thanks for time apart:
time to sit in peace;
time to sit in quiet;
time to sit with thoughts and feelings;
time to let our masks slip
and own the hurt and pain that is ours today.

In this space there is no need to pretend,
no need to put on brave faces
and don smiles that do not reach our eyes or our hearts.

Here you welcome us as we are
in all our brokenness and vulnerability,
in all our grief and sorrow,
in all that we long for and all that we miss.

Your welcome holds out the promise of healing.

May we know your love holding us close
as we feel your nearness here in this place.
Amen.

Prayer 2

God,
who in Jesus,
wept for a loved one
who had died;

God,
who through the centuries watched
as brothers fought
and parents hurt each other
and children cried;

God,
who in Jesus
knew betrayal and pain
and deep sadness;

God
who sometimes feels very distant
but never is;

God,
be with us tonight,
be within our hearts,
be with us in those around us,
be with us through your Holy Spirit,
be with us in love.
Amen.

Reading

Luke 2:25-38

Carol

Remembering 1

Three candles are lit as these words are spoken, one candle per stanza.

We light a candle to bring light into our darkness:
into the darkness of sorrow;
into the darkness of loss;
into the darkness of feeling out of step
with the rest of the world.
We light a candle that allows us to speak
of where we are and where we have been
and of a future as yet unknown.
We light a candle to bring light.

We light a candle to speak of love:
love known;
love lost;
love missed forever;
and, as the flickering flame reminds us
of the fragility of love,
we remember too the tenacity of love
that lasts beyond death,
beyond life itself.
We light a candle of love.

We light a candle
whose light stretches into the future
with its promise of peace
drawing us forward
into the promise
of healing and wholeness.
In the light of this candle
we dare to hope
that darkness will not overwhelm
the light and the love that came down at Christmas.
We light a candle for the future.

*Once the candles are lit, folk are invited to bring forward their
gift tags to hang them on the tree and take a bauble from the
tree that they can take home.*

During this have some music playing quietly.

Remembering 2

*Use these words before inviting people to come forward to light
a candle/tealight and place these on a cross shape covered in
tin foil in order to reflect the candle light.*

We light our candles
thinking of loved ones
who aren't with us this Christmas.

Some have died,
some are far away,
some are lost,
some are estranged,
we only know they are not here
and we miss them.

We light our candles,
taking some time
out of the bustle of the season
to remember those we love.

We light our candles
and place them on the cross
remembering Mary,
whose heart was pierced with sorrow
even as she cradled her newborn son.

We light our candles,
the flames flicker,
their reflection
spreads light
through our darkness.

We light our candles
and it is good to share with others,
to remember that we are not alone
in our loss,
to remember
the love that came down
at Christmas.

We light our candles
and somehow
our loved ones
seem close
and hope is ignited again
as we remember
that love never dies
and the light that came into the world
can never be put out.

Reflection 1

May the sparkle and glitter of each Christmas card we receive
bring messages from friends that surround us with love.
May the twinkling lights on trees in homes and in streets
pierce the swirling darkness of our loss.
May each Carol we hear sung or played in this season
become a melody that infiltrates our song of grief.
May shepherds and angels, whatever their age,
whisper the Christmas story again in our ears:
a story of light dispelling darkness,
of hope overcoming despair,
of joy penetrating sorrow
and of love born in a stable
to stay with us forever.

Prayer

In this season, O God,
when it seems that the world has moved on
and that we are alone in our grief,
send angels to sit with us awhile.

In this season, O God,
when we feel on the edge of the crowds
in our villages and towns,
send angels to be where we are.

In this season, O God,
when our loss stands out
at odds with the revelry all around us,
send angels to sing their song of peace
deep in our hearts.

And may those angels stay with us,
shielding us, protecting us, comforting us,
enfolding us in love that lasts forever.
Amen.

Reflection 2

Christmas doesn't work for everyone,
does it God?

For a lot of people Christmas is sad
and full of bad memories.

For a lot more Christmas is cold
and hungry, and lonely.

Help us God to watch and to listen;
to watch out for people who might need our help,
to listen to people who tell us their stories.

And even though it's Advent
and we're supposed to be watching and listening,
it's ok to act too,
when that's what's needed.

It's ok to cry
and to talk about sad stuff
and to love and listen.

It's ok to give someone cash for their meter
or food for their table.
It's good to share our resources.

Christmas doesn't work for everyone,
does it God?

But it might work a bit better
if we looked for you
in the people around us,
as well as in the manger.

Carol

Blessing

Said together.

May we hear the song of the Angels
Proclaiming peace on earth
May we feel the stirrings of hope
bringing light in every darkness
May we know love this Christmas
born as a baby in a manger
And may we know the comfort of being cradled by God
whose love carries us through all of life and death
God with us now and forever
Amen





advent 1
sunday 27 november 2016

a sleepless night

bible notes

Rebalance and Restoration

Daniel 6:6-27
(Luke 23:1-5)

IN MANY WAYS, IT MIGHT SEEM A STRANGE PLACE at the beginning of Advent to be entering the lion's den with Daniel. Traditionally we would be hearing from prophets who have more poetic things to say that convey the dream of God in words of encouragement and woe through Isaiah and Jeremiah. Daniel however, a prophet too, offers a prophecy of fewer words but more action and it is perhaps this that makes Daniel a significant and important opening act in Advent.

So let us begin the tale, not just of Daniel but of the incarnation that was born to confront the world as it was then and as it continues now. This is an invitation to live out faith despite the world thinking and moving in a quite different direction.

The lion's den of Daniel is a wonderful story of bravery and loyalty, trust and faith. Who would ever dare to be a Daniel, confident enough in the God who would protect him when the door of the den was opened? But there is more to the story. We do still use the phrase 'entering the lion's den' to refer to taking on a mammoth challenge against insurmountable odds, but the phrase has lost its original connection from Daniel's era where the king's court was often referred to as 'The Lion's Den': a place of power, danger and intrigue.

With that in mind, can we read this story as a metaphor for believers confronting the powers of the world and trusting they will survive that confrontation when everyone else is hanging onto a different set of values? This is why, perhaps, Daniel can so readily introduce us to Advent where the belief, the motive of God putting on skin, of love incarnate, willing to give all for the sake of others, is what we as followers hang on to while the rest of the world runs after security, possessions and gain.

There is a rebalance at work here: of holding onto incarnation and enabling that promise to rebalance our neighbourhood, community and world.

But there is more to Daniel welcoming us into Advent than that. The king, bound up by his sampans and rules, appearing weak and easily led, in the cold hard light of a new day does come around to realising what is just and righteous. He releases Daniel, for he recognises he has been led into a corner he could



not get out of easily. But he broke his own rules in order for justice to be done. This is not just a rebalancing of the order of things. This is restorative.

In this doorway into the Advent season Daniel gives this restorative gift to us also: we can turn back to God and restore our relationship. This season is one of restoration, refocusing ourselves and daring to trust the ancient promise of incarnation of a flesh-shaped, love-given, poverty-born kingdom among the people on the edge where no palace or parliament can interfere.

The soundtrack is the voice of the prophets we know so well, but the activity of Advent is one of being a Daniel, daring to believe and confront a world that often moves in the opposite direction. Keep the faith in Advent. Listen for the Word of life and follow it. Trust the truth of the story we have been given and face the world, not with the familiar, easy going Christmas clichés but with the voice of protest, the call for justice, the belief in love and the rebalancing of the world by a God who is found in flesh just like us all. Dare we, dare we, dare we believe that as we enter the lion's den of a worldly Christmas dominated by consumerism and chintz, that we might trust a message of rebalance and restoration?

the story

They Were Out To Get Him

Voice 1: They were out to get him
and if they didn't get him soon
Darius the king was going to put him
in charge of the empire
and they would be out of a job.

It was a stitch-up.
He was far too honest to be accused of anything
so they cooked up a plot involving an ancient law
and his religion.

Voice 2: So who were they?

Voice 1: They were the presidents,
the prefects,
the satraps,
the counsellors
and the governors of the Kingdom of Babylon.

Voice 2: And who was he?

Voice 1: He was an Israelite
who had been captured as a young man
by King Nebuchadnezzar
and had been brought to Babylon as a prisoner
and had been educated to serve in the royal court.

And his name was Daniel.

Voice 2: Dare to be a Daniel.

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel?

Voice 1: That's the one.

You remember the story?

The king was persuaded to sign a document which
said that anyone found praying within the next thirty
days who was not praying to him would be thrown
into a den of lions.

And who was found praying not to the king but to the
God of Israel?

Voice 2: It was Daniel.

Voice 1: So Daniel ended up in the lion's den.
And somehow Daniel survived the night
with an angel
to keep him company.

And the king was so impressed that he fed
the prefects,
the presidents,
the satraps,
the counsellors,
the governors
and all their families
to the hungry lions,
who by now were more than ready for their breakfast.

And then he
ordered the whole world
to pray to the living God
who had rescued Daniel from the den of lions.



Voice 2: Inspiring stuff!

Voice 1: Interpretations, explanations and questions about
this story have abounded over the years.

Voice 2: What have people said about this story?

Voice 1: Was Daniel an actual person or a symbol of a faithful
Israelite?

Was there really a 'Lion's Den' or was it a metaphor
for the king's court?

Why make a law that lasts for only thirty days?

Why make a law that could never be changed?

Did the king's efforts to save Daniel include drugging
or over-feeding the lions before Daniel was put into
their den?

Is this a story about the power of prayer?

Is this a story about breaking unjust laws and
standing up for what you believe in?

It's a good story for the start of Advent:
a story of faith and hope, justice and deliverance.

Voice 2: Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel?

And why not every child and woman and man?

the story

Retelling For Young People

Daniel's Story

There's a story in the bible about a man called Daniel who survived a night in a den full of lions. It's a good story. Are you listening?

Daniel was a young man who lived with his friends in Babylon. He had been taken there as a prisoner from Jerusalem by a king with a very long name: King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel had been taught how to read and write the Babylonian language and had been educated in the royal court. Daniel believed in God and God had given Daniel the ability to understand dreams. Nebuchadnezzar had been troubled by his dreams and when Daniel was able to help him understand what they meant Nebuchadnezzar was very pleased with Daniel.

Years later a man called Darius became the ruler of the Babylonian empire and he began to think about who could help him rule his new kingdom. Darius watched Daniel and decided that he could trust him, and wondered if Daniel should be put in charge of ruling the kingdom.

When the other people in the king's court found out what Darius was thinking they decided that they had to get rid of Daniel or they would be out of a job. They came up with a plan. They would get the king to sign a document that said that anyone found praying to God would be thrown into a den of lions.

Darius the king did not know that Daniel prayed to God every day, but Daniel's enemies, the court officials did. Once Darius had been persuaded to sign the document, the court officials waited until they saw Daniel praying by his open window and they went to tell Darius.

Darius listened to the officials and he was sad. He liked

Daniel. He did not want to see Daniel killed. But the court officials told Darius that the document that he had signed was a law that could not be broken.

Darius tried to think of ways to save Daniel, but there were none. When evening came, Darius sent for Daniel. Darius said to Daniel, "May your God who you so faithfully serve, deliver you." Then Daniel was thrown into the lion's den and a big stone was rolled across the den's entrance.

Darius the king had a very bad night. He could not sleep and he did not feel like eating.

Early in the morning Darius hurried to the den of lions. He shouted, "Daniel, has your God, whom you so faithfully served, delivered you?"

Daniel answered, "Yes."

Daniel told the king that God had sent an angel to be with him in the lion's den and none of the lions had harmed him.

The king shouted for his soldiers and officials and the stone was rolled back. Daniel came out of the den, but the angel had disappeared.

King Darius gave an order to his soldiers. The officials who had plotted against Daniel were thrown into the lion's den and the lions had a very good breakfast!

Later, King Darius wrote to the people in his kingdom. He told them all about the God who had saved Daniel from the lions.

And Daniel went on living in the royal court helping King Darius to rule his kingdom.

worship ideas

Through the Season

Please visit [pages 4 and 5](#) where you will find ideas that can be used to help create a linking theme through the season. This season is creating a large dreamcatcher to which different elements are added. This week thread some black and red feathers into the web as a symbol of those dreams we do not want to have or for the things that keep us awake at nights.

Gathering Activity

Advent is upon us! It is a new season and we begin to explore hopes and dreams.

The four Sundays of Advent will focus on four very different dreams, visions and hopes for the future. Daniel; Joel; Isaiah and Mary, mother of Jesus.

For the gathering activities throughout Advent, we will encourage people to focus on their dreams, their hopes, their vision for the future. Christmas is five weeks away: this is the longest Advent as Christmas falls on a Sunday so it begins with a full five weeks to go.

If you are used to creating a themed installation as part of

your gathering activity you may want to have some rich blue or purple fabric to cover your table. This can then hold visual prompts for dreams and visions. Make some big clouds out of card or big pieces of cotton wool. If you choose card, you can write the words "visions" "dreams" "hopes" directly onto the card. If you use a more three dimensional substance, write the words on card, cut them out and attach them to each cloud.

If you are more likely to use a more reflective prompt, see each week below for ideas and suggestions.

Daniel: Hope

Advent begins.

As we begin this period of preparation, reflect on the ways that you are inspired. How would you describe it? Taking the theme words of visions, hopes, and dreams, consider times when you have had to stand, as Daniel did, for your own beliefs, even when all around you seemed to be abandoning theirs. Daniel faithfully held onto his hope that God would never be destroyed.

worship ideas

Call to Worship

If your Advent tradition includes the lighting of candles on an advent wreath, you may wish to use the words in brackets.

Holy One,
the season of hope is upon us:
hope for the future;
hope for the promise;
hope for all that is to be.

Receive our worship this day,
(and as we light our first candle we pray)
that we may live and worship you in hope.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Lord God, on this first Sunday of Advent,
we gather in wonder in your presence.

We come amazed at the
the mystery of the Christmas story.
We come, humbled and honoured,
to know that you love us so much
that you were willing to come and
live among us,
to share in our humanity,
to take the risk of entering
into this fragile, dangerous world
as a vulnerable child.

Lord, your love and faithfulness
knows no bounds,
they are new every morning
and they are eternal.

Like the faithful who have gone before us,
may we be faithful to you,
faithful in prayer,
in our living and in our being.

We are sorry for those times
when we fail to be faithful,
when we are at fault with you or others.

Hear us now in a moment's silence
as we confess our faults and failings.

Silence

Forgive us, O Lord, as you have promised,
and help us to begin again anew.
Guide us by your spirit and make us strong
and confident disciples,
always willing to walk in your way.
So be it.
Amen.

All-Age Prayer

Mysterious God, star-maker.

May your star-light shine down on us
as we gather to worship you this day.

May your star-light flood this dark winter world
with bright beaming light that fills every dark corner.

May your star-light enter every human being
and fill them with your never ending love.

May your star-light guide us back to you
as we wait patiently with Mary and Joseph
to welcome you once more into our world.

May your star-light give us strength:
strength to stand firm in our faith.

May your star-light revive our tired
bodies and minds and give us energy
for the weeks ahead.

May your star-light shine in us
and through us so that everyone
may know of your amazing light,
the light that shines in the darkness,
the light that can never be put out.

Star-maker, help us to shine for you.
Amen.

Reflection

Walking into the lion's den...
the powerful and hungry
eyeing me up,
from head to foot and back:
what am I good for?

Walking into the lion's den...
facing my fears,
facing my frailty,
facing my weakness,
facing my mortality:
what is my life good for?

Walking into the lion's den...
confronting what diminishes,
challenging what devours,
calling out what deceives,
constraining what dominates:
what can the Lord do through me?

Walking from the lion's den...
protected,
treasured,
vindicated,
and ready for anything:
what can I do now?

Walking from the lion's den...
inspiring others,
changing perspectives,
overturning understanding:
this is God working in my life!

Prayers for Others and Ourselves

God of all hopefulness,
revive our hope, revive our faith, revive our spirits.

Let us rise up with strength and courage
to stand tall and proud,
to face injustice head on,
to speak up for the voiceless,
to bring release to the captives,
to reclaim this time of Advent
as a time of preparation,
of waiting and re-turning to our God.

May we use these weeks of Advent to focus on you.
May we seek you out in quiet moments,
in silent seconds, in places where
we may not have imagined to meet you.

May we take time to think of others,
to look for the lost and lonely,
to see the outcast and the stranger,
to pay attention and follow the spirit's guiding.

Humanity is so frail and vulnerable,
each one of us depends on others,
each one of us needs to know
we are loved and cared for.

Lord, may we share your love
with all people,
not just with our loved ones,
those closest to us,
but with the person beside us on the bus,
the child in the playground,
the elderly person struggling to carry their messages.

Lord, may we share your hope
with all people,
may we remind them of the light
that came into the world so long ago,
the light that is still here, burning brighter than ever.
May we be bearers of the light
to all who feel darkness overtaking them.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.
Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Faithful God, giver of all gifts,
receive our offerings this day,
take and use what we offer,
in both money, time and talents,
for the benefit of your kingdom.

Help us to freely give what we have,
and to remain faithful servants
today and always.
Amen.

Take Home Ideas

The take home idea for this week is the start of something that will take you beyond Christmas through to the Transfiguration. For this, you need a large jar or a jar per person if you want to do one each. This jar is to be a 'Jar of Blessings'. Each week there will be a suggestion as to what you can add to it. You can buy large jars at bargain shops for a few pounds or you could recycle. You may want to decorate your jar. It would also be good to have it somewhere visible so it can act as a reminder of your blessings as it catches congregants eyes each time they enter the church or their home.

This week on a piece of paper, which can be folded into a star shape (for a sample idea see this YouTube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6MS4SAKOR0>), write down a hope that you have for the world as Advent begins.

Sending

We have worshipped together in hope.
We have sung God's praises.
We have shared the hope of new beginnings.
Now may God's blessing of hope be with us
this day,
this week,
this Advent season.



worship ideas

Praise/Hymns

Candle-Lighting

Christmas is coming	CH4 282
Hope is a candle, once lit by the prophets	CH4 284
Light a candle bright and tall	see right
The candles at Advent	see page 128

General Worship

All that I am, all that I do	CH4 505
Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart	CH4 465 / MP 51
Come and find the quiet centre	CH4 716
Courage, brother! Do not stumble	CH4 513
Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you	CH4 191 / MP 115
Father, hear the prayer we offer	CH4 255
For justice, for freedom, for mercy	CH4 720
God of freedom, God of justice	CH4 263
God of great and God of small	CH4 174
Inspired by love and anger	CH4 253
Jesus Christ is waiting	CH4 360
Longing for light, we wait in darkness	CH4 543
Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy	CH4 166 / MP 882
The King of love my shepherd is	CH4 461 / MP 649
When the storms of life are raging	CH4 570

Light a candle bright and tall

1. Light a candle bright and tall
For the Hope within our world.
Hope that heard the ages' call
As the stars and planets whirled.
Shine within our hearts today
Come, O Hope, to us, we pray.
2. Light a candle bright and tall
For the Peace we wish to know.
Peace on Earth for great and small
God's Good News to us bestows.
Shine within our hearts today
Come, O Peace, to us, we pray.
3. Light a candle bright and tall
For the Joy this season brings.
Joy like fountains brimming full.
Through our world now let it ring!
Shine within our hearts today
Come, O Joy, to us, we pray.
4. Light a candle bright and tall
For a Love which knows no end.
Love that comes to one and all.
Fear and hatred to upend.
Shine within our hearts today
Come, O Love, to us, we pray.
5. Light a candle bright and tall
For the Christ we greet today.
Christ has come, our all in all.
With the angels, let us say:
Shine within our hearts today
Come, O Christ, to us, we pray.

7.7.7.7.7

Tune: Dix

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Written for the congregation of First United Church,
Bloomington, Indiana <http://firstuc.org>.

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It is suggested that this hymn be used during the lighting of Advent candles with the appropriate stanza sung each week during the season. Singing of the entire hymn is appropriate for Christmas Eve/Day services.

age group ideas

gathering

In Other's Shoes

all age

You will need: shoes, either old shoes you have asked the children/congregation to bring in or pictures of shoes.

Hide the shoes around your meeting room and then get the children to work in teams to find and match the sets shoes. Use this activity as an introduction to Advent and the journey we make through Advent to Christmas. Talk about the different people we will meet over the next few weeks in our stories from the Bible and the way each of them helps us prepare for the birth of Jesus. Specifically this week, talk about Daniel and how he was faithful to God.

games

Trust Me

all age

You will need: set up an assault course around your meeting room with a variety of different object, blindfolds.

This game can be used for all ages you may need to adjust the types of activities each group participates in. Divide the children and young people into pairs. One of the partners in the pair is blindfolded and their partner must guide them through the course. Once the first person has completed the course, the second person in the pair can try to complete it. This is a game of trust and following instructions. Did Daniel trust and follow instructions? As a summary, chat through these questions with your children and young people.

Doing The Opposite

age 9-12

This can be used in combination with the game above as a follow on or it can also be used as a game in its own right. Invite the children and young people to take part in the obstacle course again. Only this time, one of the partners must direct the other through the course by giving them the opposite instructions and the person receiving the instruction must then think what they are being asked to do and do the opposite! For example, if they have to 'climb over a box,' they will hear the instruction 'go under this box', they know they have to do the opposite so they then can step over it. This game takes a lot of concentration and good listening skills.

activities

Protection

age 6-12

You will need: various fragile items (for example, egg, teacake, light bulb, china tea cup, and so on).

At the start of the session, give each young person something delicate to look after. Continue with the session giving no explanation as to why you have given them this item. At the end of the session, gather them together to collect their item and chat about how well they looked after it.

- Was it hard to protect their item from getting broken as they carried out their tasks today?
- How did they protect their item?
- How was Daniel protected in the lion's den?

Believe Me

age 9-12

You will need: a variety of different items.

Daniel stood up for what he believed and trusted that God would protect him even though what he believed was different to what most people in the country believed. In this activity the children are split into to teams. Each team is given a selection of items and they must convince the other team that the item has a completely different purpose than the obvious one.

For example, a pair of sunglasses are not for keeping the sun out of your eyes at all but in fact are a hairband for girls to keep their hair back off their face, or that this selection of books are actually for lifting up the projector in church, or that a newspaper is actually for making craft objects! Whether a team is convincing is up to the leader to decide. Daniel stood up for what he believed to be true, can the children do so too?

Prayer Baubles

all age

You will need: Christmas tree, baubles.

As we start the season of Advent and celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas time, we start to decorate our homes and the places in which we worship. This is an activity that can be built upon each week.

Decorate a Christmas tree with the children and young people in your group. As you decorate your tree, chat with the children and young people about today's Bible story about Daniel being brought to King Darius because he had broken the new law that praying was not allowed.

Use the bauble decorations as prayer baubles and encourage the children and young people to write prayers on each bauble using a marker pen and together as a group pray about each as you place them on the tree. Continue to pray each week during your time together as the children and young people place new baubles on their Christmas Prayer tree.

Encourage the children and young people to understand the importance of prayer and talking with God.



age group ideas

crafts

We are suggesting crafts for each week of Advent based on the readings which we hope you will find useful as they are or as a jumping off point for ideas of your own. If you are busy preparing for a Nativity play or some other special Christmas event, you may find that you do not have time for the suggested crafts. There are many craft activities and craft packs available online and from craft suppliers which you could make available to the children in your group for them to be busy working on their own while others rehearse songs and sections of Nativity plays.

Lion Mask

age 3-5

You will need: paper plates with cut out holes for eyes, crayons, PVA glue, glue spreaders and brown, yellow and orange paper or thin card cut into strips roughly 6 cm long by 1 cm wide.

Give each child a paper plate and instruct them to draw a lion's face onto the centre section. Give each child a selection of coloured strips and have them stick the strips around the edge of the plate with ends of strips hanging over the outside edge of the plate to form a lion's mane. Decorate further as desired.



Talk about the story and how Daniel stuck with God and kept on worshipping God. Discuss ways we can worship God this Advent.

Lion Mask / Daniel Mask

age 6-8

You will need: paper plates with cut out holes for eyes, crayons, PVA glue, glue spreaders and brown paper or thin card cut into strips about 1 cm wide in a variety of lengths.

For Lion Mask, follow the instructions above.

Give each child a paper plate and get them to draw a Daniel face in the centre section. Instruct the children to stick brown strips onto the plate as hair and a beard. Depending on the numbers in your group and the time available, get the children to make a lion mask and a Daniel mask each.

Have the children act out today's story using their masks. You could have a Darius mask or crown already prepared to use during the retelling of the story. Discuss the story and how Daniel stuck with God and kept on worshipping God. Talk about ways we can keep on worshipping God this Advent.

Advent Stars

age 9-12

You will need: silver and gold card, pencils, scissors, sticky labels, silver and gold metallic pens, small pegs (like those used to hang up Christmas cards), silver and gold paper plates, a hole punch and gift ribbon.

Give each child a silver or gold plate and instruct them to punch 7/8 holes around the edge of the plate. Give each child a sheet of gold and a sheet of silver card and get them to draw and cut out 7/8 stars from the card. Note that the stars should be about 10 cm from point to point. Next, have the children punch a hole in one of the points of each star. Then, give the children a sticker for each star. They should draw or write on the sticker with the metallic pens. One sticker is about Daniel so the children should write his name and draw or write something about Daniel which describes how Daniel is a 'star' showing us the way to live like God desired. For example, a child might draw praying hands, a lion or write the words faithful or loyal. The children should make a star with their own name and other stars with names of people who help or inspire them to live God's way. Lastly, the children should thread a piece of ribbon through hole in star and attach other end of the ribbon to one of the holes in the ring. The children can keep adding to this during Advent.

Discuss the story and how Daniel stuck with God and kept on worshipping God. Talk about the people who help/inspire us to keep on worshipping God and how we can help others to keep worshipping God this Advent.

Shoe Advent Calendar

all age

This is a project which can be worked on and developed throughout Advent. Please note that there is a 2 dimensional and 3 dimensional option, depending on the desired difficulty level.

You will need:

2D: A large sheet of card, one for each week or long piece of lining or frieze paper divided into sections, pictures of shoes from gathering activity, PVA glue, glue spreaders, star shapes, felt tip pens, scraps of paper, card, fabric and wool, and so on, for a collage.

3D: A large piece of fabric or corrugated card, one for each week or divided into sections, a table, board or area where you can leave this set up and add to it each week, old shoes from gathering activity, stars, felt tip pens, scraps of fabric, card, paper and wool, and such like for a collage.

2D: Stick the shoes and stars onto the background and then add symbols from today's story, such as a lion, Daniel, names of children or praying hands.

3D: Lay out fabric or card (paint background onto card) and place the shoes, stars and symbols from today's story, such as lion (model or made from collage materials), Daniel, name plaques or praying hands.

Talk about Advent and ways we prepare for Christmas. Talk about people who can help us on our journey, people we read about in the Bible and people we meet. Discuss ways we can help each other to journey well through Advent.

discussion starters for teens

taking a stand

Preparation

Today you will need to find out about some people who have stood up for their beliefs (for example Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi, William Wilberforce, the Suffragettes, and so on). You might want to show or print off some pictures and information about them. You might also want to show a short video about Rosa Parks. There are several readily available on YouTube. If you play the blindfold games mentioned below, you will need strips of cloth to serve as blindfolds.

Opening Activity

Trust Me

The blindfold games in the all-age section would be ideal for teenagers, too! See [page 15](#).

The Word

Read Daniel 6:1-27.

- Is this a surprising story for the start of Advent as we begin thinking about Christmas?
- Is there anything that jumps out at you in the story?
- Did you notice anything new or unexpected?

Read Luke 23:1-5.

- Are there any similarities between these two stories?
- What is going on in these two stories?

Activity/Discussion

Daniel is one of those books of the Bible where things are perhaps not always what they seem. It's what is known as an apocalyptic book, one that tells about heaven being revealed to people here on Earth, similar to Revelation at the end of the Bible. The stories tell us something about the world, about God, and about what our relationship with God is supposed to be like.

- If you were King Darius, would you have been tempted to make a law that everyone had to worship you for a month?
- Why do you think he did it?

By this point in the story, Daniel was very high up in the government. He was in charge of the whole kingdom. Daniel was a foreigner though. He was a Jew who had been captured when the Babylonians had attacked Jerusalem, but the old Babylonian king trained Daniel and his friends and they had risen to positions of authority. The Babylonians were jealous of Daniel's wisdom.

- How does it feel to be jealous?
- Would it make people do things they wouldn't normally do to get what they want?
- Does being in a group or crowd make it easier to go along with what is happening?
- Does anyone have experience of people challenging what you believe?



- How does it feel when you stand up for what you believe in?
- Have you had to do that?
- What things would you stand up for?

Show or tell the story of Rosa Parks, the woman of colour who in 1955 refused to give up her seat on a bus for a white person in Montgomery, Alabama, during the height of segregation. She is pictured above with Martin Luther King Jr in the background.

- Do you know of other people who have taken a stand for what they believe? (Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi, Wilberforce, Suffragettes, etc.)
- What do these people have in common?

Living It Out

Try to notice if you are tempted to say something you do not really believe or do something you don't really want to so that you fit in with what others think and do this week.

- How does it feel when that happens?

sampler

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